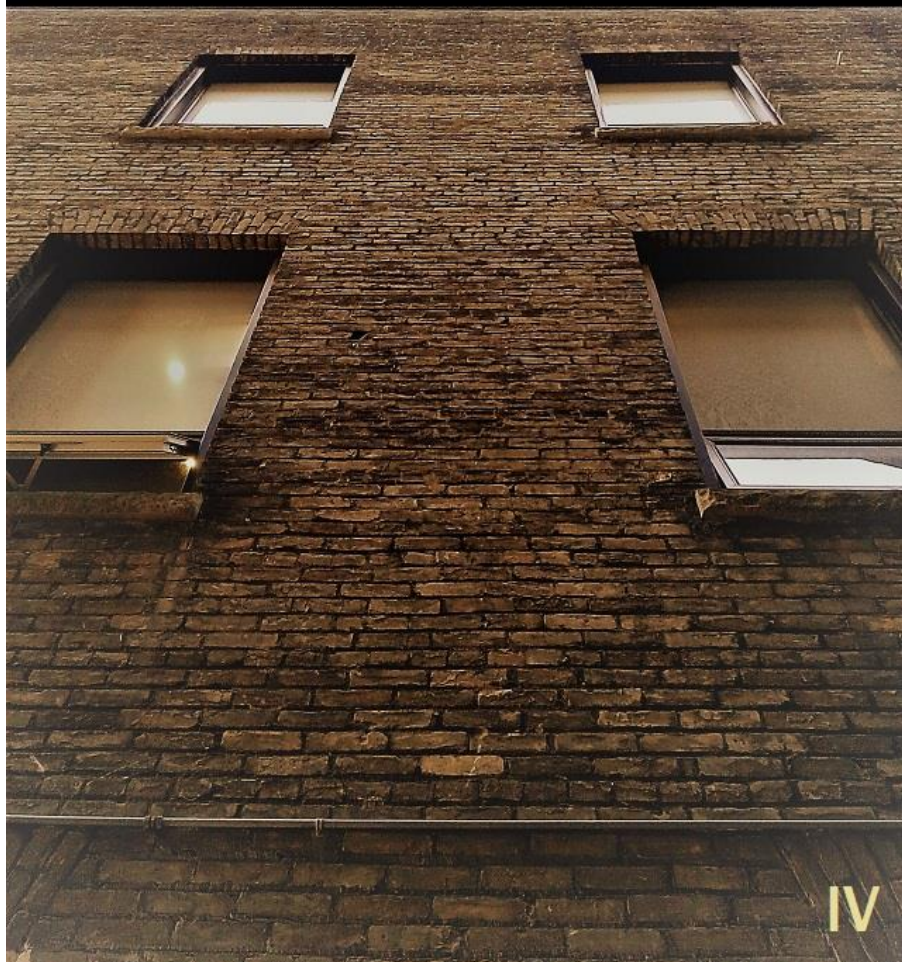


Synaeresis

arts + poetry



IV

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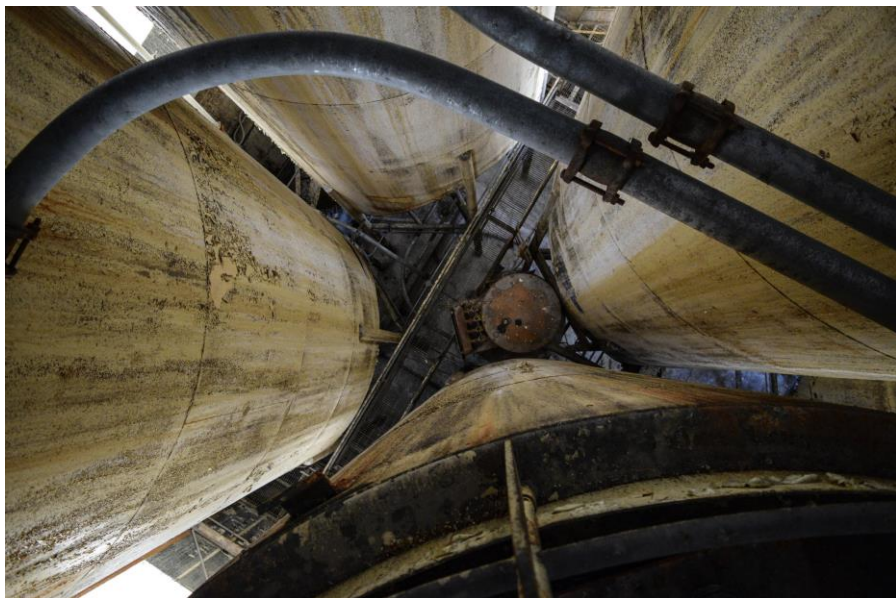
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Candyland – Andrew Lawton



Bruce McRae

Magnificent Whirlwind

When I think about squares I think about triangles.
Storm clouds trigger troubled thoughts on heavy metals.
Sunrise, to me, is a songbird singing down a mineshaft.

All my life I have been decidedly different.
All my life has been lived on an alternate Earth,
a glass planet, a world of soft wood,

replete with sugar-animals, tin bugs and paper fishes,
with its moons on inside-out and back-to-front,
a world of garrulous continents and iodine seas.

Now I lie in an awkward position and put lights in the sky.
Every night is a god with a thumb in its mouth,
every dream a mathematical construction.

See? My laboured breath is a magnificent whirlwind.
I am pampered and made to suffer in turns.
Even the cat knows I am destined to live separate and alone,

that it's my curse to walk knee-deep in profound outrage,
my sole fate to marry hope unto horror.
That to exist is my wonderful burden.

From Now And Here

This time next year
some of us will have surrendered
to the weakness of the flesh.

This time next year
you'll feel twelve months heavier.
Your pockets, and head, lighter.

One of us will be missing a finger.
One will dare risk looking
into the smelted core of the divine.
Another will have forsaken emotion.

Three hundred and sixty odd
days and nights from now and here.
The X minutes and Y seconds.
An algebra of living mass.
A fatty math of bloodied tissues.

Which means this time next year
we'll all be farther along the crooked path.
New scars will have formed.
Choices will have proved themselves
to be neither right nor wrong.
We'll have made some big decisions,
the repercussions only then apparent.

Some will have had their molecules shattered,
their ashes scattered in a green river.

Some of us will carry a child
they'd never guessed would have existed.

Next year at this time –
the same stars in the same sky,
but everything will *seem* different.

I've heard how time changes everything.
I'm learning that change matters.

Hitting The Hay

Goodnight world-toy. Goodnight green fishes.
Goodnight neon and noisy kitchenettes.
Goodnight Orpheus. Goodnight Tantulus and erotica.

I turn three times in a bed wet with dew.
I snore like Euripides, dreaming in nuances,
dreaming of staccato-braying jackasses,
of inorganic and immense distances.

A blue that's darker than blue ...
Take note of its inexact limitations
and our great need for intimacy.
Think of all that languid blushing, Pere Ubu.
We adore and accuse you.

You, provincial. I, parochial.
And they, radically conservative.
So nothing can move and no word is ever uttered.
Nothing flamboyant. Nothing vaguely threatening.

Only the calm that comes
between two randomnesses, two verbs, two instances.
Just the peace from knowing
one truth is not equal to another.

Bruce McRae, a Canadian musician currently residing on Salt Spring Island BC, is a multiple Pushcart Prize nominee with well over a thousand poems published internationally in magazines such as *Poetry*, *Rattle*, and the *North American Review*. His books are *The So-Called Sonnets* (Silenced Press), *An Unbecoming Fit Of Frenzy* (Cawing Crow Press), *Like As If* (Pskis Porch), and *Hearsay* (The Poet's Haven).

John Grey

Aspens

Aspens grow in places
where they too easily die,
on slopes, rooted in rock crop,
battered by wind and snow.

Wood white and sort,
initials carved by lovers
high on thin air,
heart is black with tears
as soon as romance's back is turned.

Aspens survive in groves,
like a herd.
as one rots from the inside out,
another sapling sprouts below.
They creep up the mountainside,
drawn by sun's promise,
to a breathless elevation,
a feckless soil.

Then petioles shake,
leaves tremble,
where the world goes further
but trees end.

Bobcat in Winter

The bobcat takes its solitude as a given.
Not for that stealthy feline,
the bundled-up bodies,
the roaring fires,
in the scattered cottages
of the northern woods.

It floats through sentinel pines
or trots down snow-packed trails,
its brown-spotted chest
pulsing hunter lean,
scoping the landscape
for vole or mouse or hare.

Winter glistens with green eyes,
its silence broken only
by a tremulous sniff.
On a stark white plain,
a nimble intruder
belongs.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in the *Homestead Review*, *Poetry East* and *Columbia Review* with work upcoming in *Harpur Palate*, *the Hawaii Review* and *Visions International*.

Carrie Connel-Gripp

Feline

She is more than a pet,
adopted from the clutches of death.
More than a replacement child,
given a forever home.
She is companion, confessor, therapist.
Comfort on a cold night
wrapped together in a blanket;
commiserating with fictional figures
running across the mind's windswept moors.
She is worshipped:
Bast on a throne constructed of bones.
The royal robe sleek and dark as night,
dotted with calico stars.
Depths of tortoise shell
shimmering in rays of sun:
Ra shining forth from eyes of sparkling topaz.
From nose to tip of tail:
proportionate perfection.

Broken Vows

I joke, saying:

“Black and blue are my favourite colours.”

Blue eyes, black heart.

You never took the bait;

no left-hand across the jaw.

I saw no excuse for my leaving.

I thought it my fault,

that I broke vows.

You lashed out using my sacred realm

against me, as sharp as

bamboo shoved beneath the nail.

And I slunk away into blissful silence,

a blackness filled with the blue fog

of depression.

You lied before the trappings

of my faith - a farce:

Corinthians cringing;

perceived wrongs listed

from one to one million,

to be thrown at my feet

with resentment,

that my “useless” education

in Defoe, Doyle, and Dumas

kept me from cooking your

medium-rare steak to perfection.

The Day

The day I fell to pieces
and told you to look away,
you took my face
in both your hands,
held my gaze
until I coalesced

The day I became ethereal,
started to float away,
you wrapped me
in strong arms,
held on tight
until I solidified

Carrie Connel-Gripp is a poet and fiction writer living in London, Ontario, with her husband Andreas and their fur kids Mabel and Mila. Her recent work has been published in *Fterota Logia* and *Aphotic Realm*. She has 2 books of poetry published by Harmonia Press: *A Day in Pieces* (2013) and *Persona Grata* (2016).

Steve Murphy

Bent

Meekly standing before you
My fingers deep in my pockets
Touching and twisting
 coins,
 keys,
 a bus transfer,
 feathers of lint

My chin rests on my chest
Shoulders curled inwards
Bowed by an invisible rope of woe

My father would likely say:
 Stand straight!
 Act like a man!

But he can't say anything.
He's dead.
And the only thing he taught me
Was how to drink.

Election Day Poem

The thorns of political parties
are sharp and dangerous today
Swarms of profligates will leave their hives
Probing for objective indication,
or subjective manipulation
of the outcome.

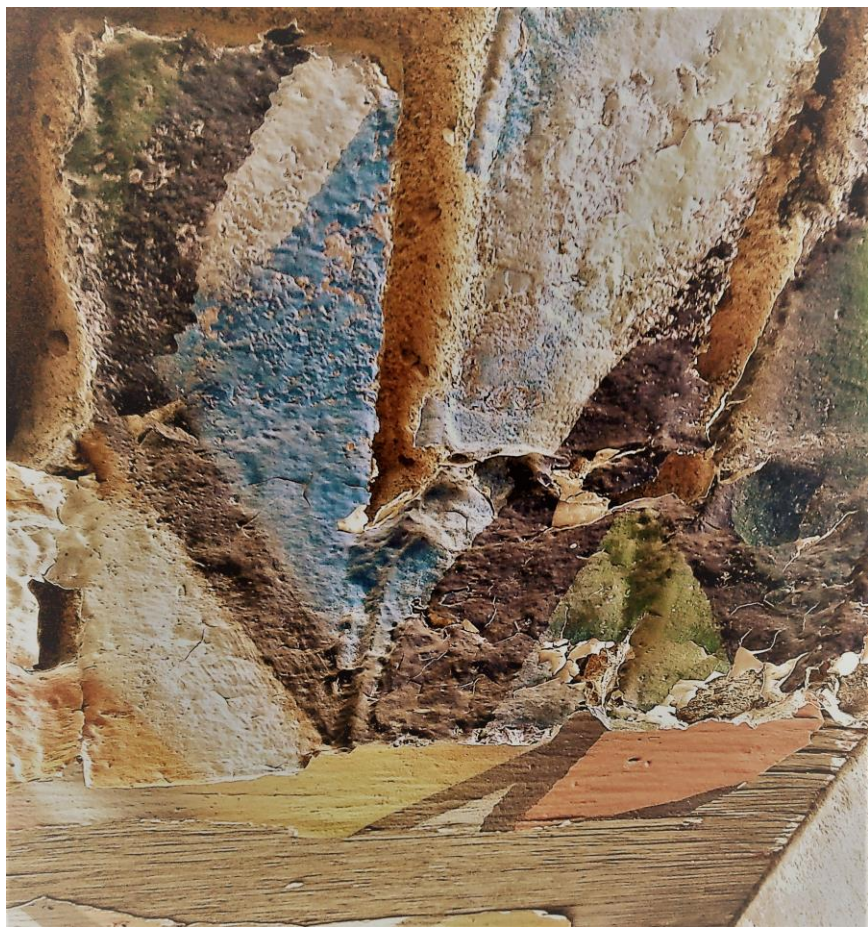
Citizens! Remain steadfast!

Delicate roses of democracy
cannot bloom on their own.

Steve Murphy is a singer, songwriter, author and freelance writer. Combining deeply personal lyrics and intimate vocals, Steve and his wife Colleen lead alt-indie-folk act *Westminster Park*. The group has released 4 albums to date including 2014's *Dear Honoured Listener* and 2017's *Fig.4 Molt Rebirth*, which were each nominated for Canada's national *Polaris Prize* Longer List. Steve's first solo album, *Lonesome Scrapbook*, and his first published collection of poetry and prose, *Late For Summer*, were released in early 2018 to critical acclaim.

He and Colleen live in London, Ontario, with their pet cat and dog, Billy Bragg & Wilco.

Transitory Canvasses — **Andreas Gripp**



David Spicer

Super Model

. . . *Poetry/is beautiful, but it ain't no super Model.*

—Terrance Hayes

I disagree. Beautiful Poetry *is* a super Model,
a savior, but not some snooty, distant catwalker

brooding in silence, the stuffy air hypnotizing her eyes
and boring everyone except the most avid mind readers,

admirers of her vacant gazes and those gestures she fakes
with learned gaits. Poetry lacking empty \$20 phrases

can mesmerize anybody with half a brain, half a will,
anyone who loves Beauty. Truth is, I adore a super Model

named Emily: she ambles down the thin lines with grace
and writes so much Poetry a loyal pal dubbed her *Poetry*.

Poetry likes to hum as she strolls, lavishing us
with goose bumps and great headaches that please,

our minds following hers. Poetry, super Model,
smiles and embraces us, a beautiful savior.

Journey: An Ars Poetica

You ask yourself and me what I am too many times.
You don't have a hint. Am I a target ruined
by rubber bullets? Or a fox at sunrise listening to
a Mahler symphony? Could be. Maybe I'm a stiletto
styled from mints molded in Vienna. Or a choir
of satin hammers singing in a colonnade of willows.
Let's strike a deal. I'll stop acting self-conscious
as a soprano named Francesca in a scarlet gown
waiting to activate her arias if you'll stop bumbling
like a pilot who's never downed a goose.
Deal, maker? Cool. Here's my secret,
crystal as perfect weather:
I'm the journey you—a moody captain—fly,
rarely giving me or my siblings a clear flight plan.
Every day you navigate different routes.
Some mornings you're calm under clouds,
other afternoons you soar for miles, never knowing
where to land, and this, poet, is my reveal:
you're not aware that near the destination
I control the dials.

David Spicer has poems in *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Magnolia Review*, *Reed Magazine*, *The Literary Nest*, *Chiron Review*, *Alcatraz*, *Gargoyle*, *Third Wednesday*, *Ploughshares*, and *American Poetry Review*. He is the author of *Everybody Has a Story* and 5 chapbooks including *From the Limbs of a Pear Tree* (Flutter Press).

William Doreski

Hansel and Gretel

Schlepping from bar to bar
in search of the perfect bourbon,
we mistake ourselves for Hansel
and Gretel scouting for witches
to roast in the ovens of our hearts—
a post-romantic conceit
we should never share in public.

You're always mumbling nothings
to your dead husband, your face
a moon on autopilot. You slur
these atonal endearments,
none of which apply to me.
I, on the other hand, drift off
with star-shaped expressions flashing
in lamplight too sallow to flatter,

The city shrugs like a tough guy
in his underwear. The streets crawl
to the harbor and abase themselves
before the elements. Long black ships
from China creak at the piers
where big cranes unload containers
with a grimace of efficiency
twenty-four hours a day.

I'd focus on the moment
the Big Bang occurred, but colors
dispute in the cosmos, blurring
my sense of time. Is this now,
or somewhere else? The kiss
you sometimes emboss on me
to keep me brimming can't weather
the next drink in the next bar.

You'll have to renew it
with slobber so offhand the dark
will mistake it for pubescence;
as if Hansel and Gretel grew up
faster than the fictions intend—
the stink of dead witch tracking them
to dark harbor water on which
you and I should learn to walk.

Auburn Lake

The lily pads of Auburn Lake
lie as flat as the citizens
of the cemetery's rosy tombs.

Painted turtles clot on the banks.
Their black cusps of shell glimmer
in light festooned through willows

to drape oblongs on the water.
July. The candor of flowers
has established itself on the graves.

The nightly insurrection of frogs
has passed, leaving a residue
adhering to shady textures.

Everyone wants to lie down here
forever, but the prices
are steeper than the stairway

inside Washington Tower,
a stone spiral climbing a view
I memorized years ago,

when I was shy enough
to spot a fox under a shrub
watching for mice the color

of granite. By this same lake
one winter I noticed my footprints
in the snow fill with gilded light,

as if I were resurrecting.
I can't recover that ersatz
glory, that tinge of absolute.

But I can watch the turtles sun
in heaps, climbing each other's
shells to hog the summer warmth.

At the end of the lake a heron
picks at the muck for a snack.
It tosses back and swallows

with one gulp elongated
to plumb the oldest, deepest graves.
But I never feel the dead stir,

even on such a polished day
with so many systems brimming.
Too satisfied with the dark,

which fills every dimension
and upholsters every absence
with a candor riper than speech.

On Leonardo's Drawings of the Skull

A clockwork moment passes,
leaving the plain air trilling.
The garden shoulders the rain
with a grateful little shrug.
Leonardo found in the polished
interior of a skull
the center of the universe,
where perception and perspective rest.

My own skull feels too heavy,
and I would doff it if I could
and lie down headless among
books I no longer want to read.
You, however, damaged
or at least bruised the bone
when you tumbled at the place
where culture borders nature
and smashed your face on a stone.

The distance foaming with cloud
reiterates my fear of debt,
my tribal cosmology warped
by lack of proper funding.

Despite the bruise on your cheek
you're fearless in the glamour
of Sunday lightning sculpting
patterns the eye can't affix.

The mechanism is flawless
despite its audible groans and sighs.
The lack of useable scenery
shouldn't deter us, the sins
of pith and resin shouldn't shame
the pleasure centers in the brain.
There Leonardo found a slick
and evolved accommodation
in which deities might settle
with or without the discourse
expected to keep us sane.

William Doreski is a New Hampshire writer whose work has appeared in various print and e-journals and in several collections, most recently *A Black River, A Dark Fall* (Splash of Red Press, 2018).

Oddity — Fabrice Poussin



Her Domain — **Fabrice Poussin**



The Ivory Tower — Fabrice Poussin



Fabrice Poussin teaches French and English at Shorter University in Georgia. Author of novels and poetry, his work has appeared in *Kestrel*, *Symposium*, *The Chimes*, and dozens of other magazines. His photography has been published in *The Front Porch Review*, the *San Pedro River Review* as well as other publications.

Penn Kemp

Land Claims

Two male cardinals clash
more than colour against
our magenta redbud. Flick
of tail, darting branch to
branch. "I'm Alpha here.
Off you go!" I wonder if
they are brothers that forget
last year's nest of fledglings.
Both claim their territory here.
Esau versus Jacob but no mess
of potage to swop. Swoops, flight —
they climb the ladder of sky till
one falls off, loops away to sulk,
hid in balsam fir till next round.
Grackle spies from birch bough.
A glimmer of speculation, what
can he gain from such commotion?

Cured

Standing in a monoculture field,
you come to understand the plant,
surrounded in its totality like this.

Slender white flower tubes, tipped
pink flames: a mockery or portent
of cigarette. *Nicotiana tabacum*.

The extravagant leaf, broad as
a duchess's fascinator, a study
in green temptation.

A power plant used in ceremony,
misused by inhalation. Medicine
or poison, like its Solanaceae cousins.
Approach with respect.

Surprised by Joy

Blessed be here. Blessed be clever cardinals
who vary their song into language only other
cardinals interpret. Blessed even be squirrels
who scold all intruders into submission.
Blessed be hostas and fern, mixing wild
with cultivated. Blessed be composted
soil that allows for splendid fluorescence.
Blessed be standing waves over the shoal.
Blessed be silent wing of crow and when it
lands on a spruce branch, that raucous caw.
Blessed be the interchange of story, space
to be alone together. Blessed be silence.
Blessed be the daily, the expanse of time.
Blessed be the dream. Blessed be night
that covers the shore in a moiré spread.
Blessed be the bare black cherry, dead
in winter's past blast but ready to turn
into fire's best wood, slow-burning,
hot. Blessed be the poet whose refrain
runs through a still too busy brain still
listening, listening to the river's flow.
Carp leap and fall, circling in stream.
Like calls to like through brightening air.

Penn Kemp is a poet, performer and playwright, lauded as a “one-woman literary industry” while London’s inaugural Poet Laureate (2010-2012) and Western’s Writer-in-Residence (2009-2010). Her newest books of poetry are *Local Heroes* (Insomniac Press, April 2018) and *Fox Haunts* (Aeolus House, September 2018). Two new plays published in 2017 about local hero Teresa Harris followed her previous books from Quattro Books, *Barbaric Cultural Practice* and *Jack Layton: Art in Action*. The three poems in this issue of *Synaeresis* are from a manuscript-in-progress, *River Revery*. See www.pennkemp.weebly.com for more on Penn and her work.

Barbara A Meier

The Grandeur of Bryce Canyon

The canyon is infused by the habitation of God,
from the particles of red sand shed
from vermillion cliffs to the pinnacles
formed by the ablution of God's hands.
The plateau will wash out like cookies
crumbled in milk, leaving orange creamsicle
hoodoos covered in powdered sugar.
The limber pines grasp the canyon walls
like martyrs clinging to God's throne,
chanting, "Holy, holy, holy",
in the breathy mist of morning.

As for us, we stand at the canyon's rim,
watching the shadows acquiesce the light.
The sun nudges a nimbus above the cliffs,
exposing the uplift and fault of Adam's sin.
We embrace the divineness of God,
in the depth of His love and erosion of sin.
We bow in the exhalation of a hovering
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Adam's Bones

“ἐν τούτῳ νικά”

In hoc signo vinces / "In this sign you will conquer"

A jumble of dry bones,
kicked like cans down the Via Dolorosa,
abandoned at the foot of a dead tree
where seekers come to find Adam's bones
but he's not there.

Just as Abraham and Isaac are no longer on Mt. Moriah,
or King David dancing on the threshing floor.
The skull kicked to the foot of the cross.

The seeker wresting the ribs from the earth,
pounding a nail into the lumber,
counting the strokes.

Just as Abram counted,
in a hide and seek game,
of "Where's the lamb?"

God tagging the sojourners
in a garden of thickets,
like capturing the flag on the hill.

The flag of a sinless death.
Golgotha without the skull,
“Olly olly oxen free,”

calls my God to me.

Barbara A Meier teaches kindergarten in Gold Beach, Oregon, where she continually frets over how to get five-year-olds to start a sentence with an uppercase letter, end with a period, and make sense. In her spare time, she looks for agates, petrified wood and fossils on the beautiful Southern Oregon beaches. She has been published in *The Poeming Pigeon*, *Cacti Fur*, *Highland Park Poetry*, and *Poetry Pacific*. Her website can be found at <https://basicallybarbmeier.wordpress.com>

Ring Leader in Paris – Pauline King Shannon (Pooks)

Acrylic Paint on Canvas, April 2014



Anu – Pauline King Shannon (Pooks)

Acrylic Paint on Canvas, July 2017



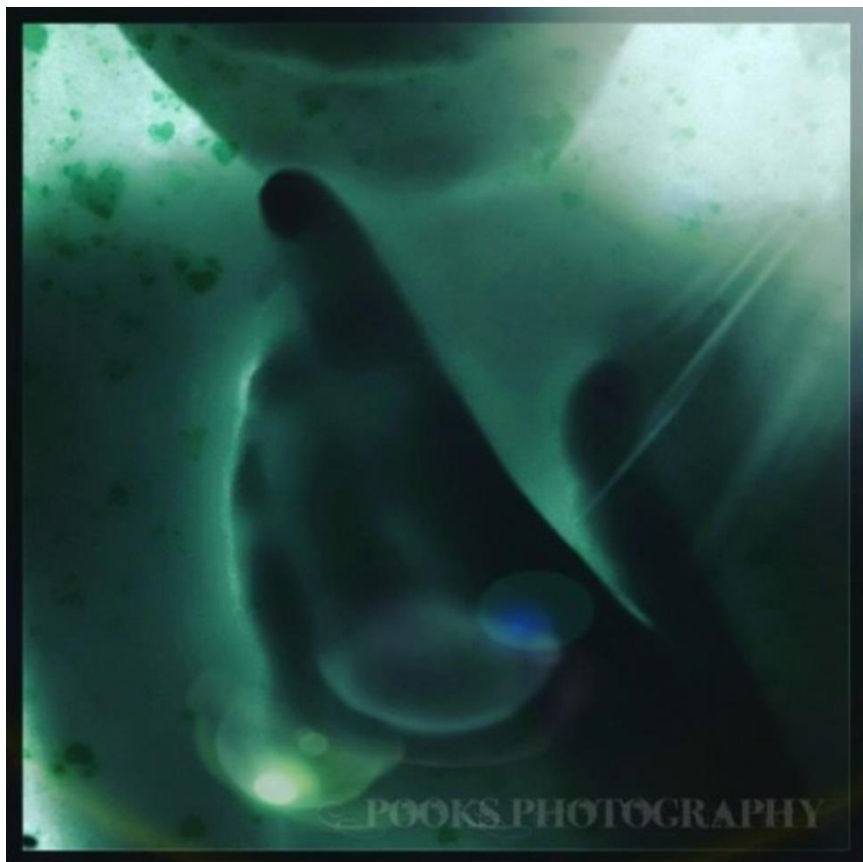
Halo-Master Chief – **Pauline King Shannon (Pooks)**

Acrylic Paint and Ink on Paper, May 2013



Out of this World – Pauline King Shannon (Pooks)

Photography and Digital Edit, June 2018



Owl – Pauline King Shannon (Pooks)
Acrylic Paint on Canvas, October 2016



Pauline King Shannon is the artist, blogger, poet, photographer, and author known as **Pooks**. Her published book is called *Random Thoughts of an Alien Goddess*. From 2011 - 2015, Pauline was a New School of Colour artist and has had her art in approximately 25 art shows, including Up With Art (2012, 2014, & 2015) and the Twitter Art Exhibit (Orlando, Florida / NYC, NY / Stanton, Norway / Avon, U.K / Canberra, AUS). She is now an independent artist, and is the writer of the WordPress blog: *Pooks82 The Vault*.

Andreas Gripp

Captain Fish Face and the Rusty, Saltwater Tank

I'd planned to write of the fish in the aquarium but by the time I got back to my apartment, I couldn't remember the kinds of fish I'd seen – just the colours and the way they aimlessly swam in their clear glass cages.

I was only at the aquarium because I didn't have anything else to undertake – well, I did or could have been more productive with my hours but never chose to and writing about it is as much a waste as the idleness of staring at fish through a pane of glass.

It was at a store, by the way, not a zoo of ocean animals and yet I treat it as so – I have no fish or turtles or sponges and the like of my own and hence have no need to ever set foot in that place that sells all of the aforementioned plus the accessories that accompany their upkeep. Of course, my not being a legitimate shopper is by no means limited to the undersea specimens on display – I do the same when looking at puppies, lizards, hamsters, and even cats (I'm a fervent lover of cats despite the fact I'm currently not in the market for one). And let's not get into furniture or sports cars on the lot.

What a waste of a salesperson's time and energy I must be. "Can I help you?" – of course you can't, dummy, I'm just another of those annoying humans coming to gawk at the non-humans being peddled in your store. Now "peddled" may sound harsh and perhaps it is, but the fact that these establishments make money on the purchase of fellow living beings smacks of exploitation and thus I can't paint these outlets as mere victims of my misuse of minutes given me by the heartbeat's continual thumping, the daily spinning of the Earth (now *there* are some fancy lines I could use in a poem, but alas, they're squandered on this rather meaningless tale).

It's easy to be righteous and selective about where I choose to be a sluggard. I don't watch the animals in the circus or the zoo or some pseudo safari-land fenced up and sanitized for mass consumption. I'm too "left-wing" for that. And of rodeos, well, it just goes without saying ...

Hypocrisy is a stranger beast than anything seen in a cage. It infiltrates our smug creeds and the way we splash our neighbours with disdain. If character is what you are in the dark, then it's best to head up north when it's "the land of the midnight sun" – *exactly where* to flee to when the planet's revolution 'round our star puts an end to all of that, well, I'll consult with my geographer friend and scribe the results in another dramatic, edge-of-your-seat kind of story.

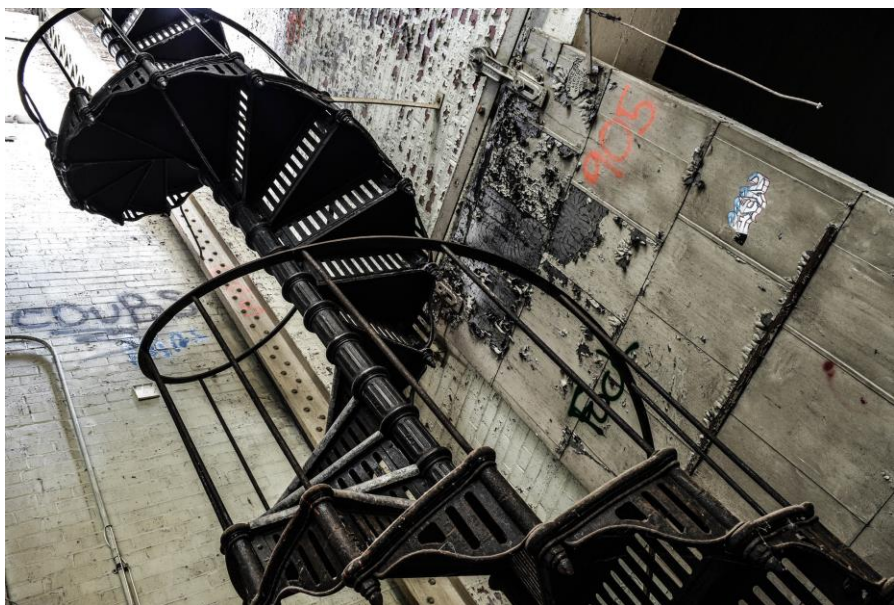
But lest my scribbling degenerate into some parody of pontificating, I'll digress and somehow try to conjure something about the fins and gills of the fish, the way their tails swished aside little dots of food or waste or whatever those specks in the water were; or what it must be like to have the eyes of those supposedly "superior" gaping at your every move, your every nibble and every personal moment you'd rather have unseen. Something about the old analogy of space aliens coming to whisk us off to their world where we're treated in the same way that *we've* behaved toward our fellow mammals and those a little "lower" on the food chain – namely, the birds, reptiles, and fish (the latter of which I still haven't said enough about even though they were to be the whole purpose of this exercise).

But enough. Even sermons are best left to Sundays (or whenever your holy day of the week is) or to those private thoughts where you think it's God speaking to you after years of protracted silence. And what would the Creator say of the fish? That they're better off in translucent boxes than in the oceans we've mucked up with garbage and spewing oil? Well, don't worry, I'll stop myself there lest another holier-than-somebody moment hatches from its incubating egg. Even a blatherer must heed the inner call to desist with typing and go squander more of the daylight.

Oh, and the colours I had started to write about but never got around to – a brilliant blue with a hue of violet, an orange burning like an agèd, far-off sun, and yellow the tone of those dandelions I told myself I’d pull from the grass one of these days when I don’t have anything better to do with my time.

Andreas Gripp is the author of 24 books of poetry, 16 chapbooks, and 3 books of fiction. Poems by Andreas Gripp have most recently appeared in the anthologies *Tamaracks: Canadian Poetry in the 21st-Century* (Lummo Press, 2018), *Another Dysfunctional Cancer Poem Anthology* (Mansfield Press, 2018), and *Piping at the End of Days* (Valley Press, 2017). His book *Anathema* was shortlisted for the *Acorn-Plantos Award for Peoples Poetry* in 2010. His latest book of poems is *Selected Poems 4th edition* (Harmonia Press, 2018). He lives in London, Ontario, with his wife Carrie and their two cats, Mabel and Mila.

Powering Down – Andrew Lawton



Candyland II – Andrew Lawton



Chemical Romance – **Andrew Lawton**



Resigned Resin – Andrew Lawton



Andrew Lawton is a broadcaster, columnist and political commentator. In his considerably limited free time, Andrew photographs abandoned and shuttered buildings, documenting the history, decay, and even emotions associated with structures that have been all but forgotten.

Meg Smith

Rose

We would tell stories on the lawn.
Your polka dot scarf was my comfort.
I could not veil you from the shouting.
With an ice pick, they carved you
a room of silence,
from your cave of us.
But I brought you there to opening night,
with gray and blue to give you some flicker.
I would be there still but
for the haze.
Words halted on a typewriter.
Do you sleep, in a grass bed
beside your cowboy hat.
Do we sleep, the grass bed between,
roots to hold hands.

When Solomon closes

This won't be the end.
The gray walls.
And who is climbing back
but the skeleton, green
teeth of blue defiance,
clawing at the red sash.
Drop the plastic tray.
Scrape the ice from the sill.
No one is going.
No one is gone.
Finger paint streaks in fire across
the sky
over a cold, cold river.
Rising to a place.
Rising to a song.

Meg Smith is a poet, writer, journalist, dancer and events producer living in Lowell, Massachusetts. Her poems have appeared in a number of literary journals including *The Cafe Review*, *The Blue Hour Anthology*, *Poetry Bay*, *Star*Line*, and *Erosha*. She has published a second book of poetry, *Dear Deepest Ghost*, available on Amazon. A third book, *This Scarlet Dancing*, is forthcoming. She welcomes visits to megsmithwriter.net

Aleah Sato

Fairytales You'll Believe

I am the letter and you are the hot wax.
I am the needle and you, the diminutive dancer.
We stuff our mouths – breadcrumbs and magpies.

I am the girl in the blue gown
Who has lost her eyes to the prick of a needle
She thought was a jewel.

I search the woods for the last slipper.
In glass – now, for good,
That goddamned story.

In the corner, a roach waves his hands feebly.
Kafka groans in my bed – he has taken
My place in this transformation.

I graffiti my name on a Paris street.
I paint my eyes with kohl and find a fire-can
Chorus to raise these words to the night.

This land is dead. The flags wrap the apocalypse
Tight as Christ in a cave.
Babies wait in jars and tubes. Everyone wants

These babies.

Their reed boats sail down rivers of history.

If I tell you a story, will you bite the hook?

If I make my breasts morsels for lions in towers,

Will the damned search stop? Will the old man

Just be dead, not slumbering, not 100?

I was promised a story that would save,

But look at the dumbstruck girl in blue

Reaching into her dress, thinking it is twilight.

The bread will break me.

The woman will cook her tears

Into red rides, into serendipity.

I am not a lady but the stable boy, the horse

That wants nothing more than to run,

Dripping ink through the forest,

A comma of froth flaring from its mouth.

Angles and a broken mirror

Cut us like cloth.

I am the wild rose
Tangled in his hair –
The spells like Normandy, like Braille

You will only know on my skin.
It has been years and the country of lies
Has mapped this deal.

It is being on to the ruse, you learn.
It is in the weaving hands of the man
Who holds your throat.

Girls, you must know
Your final sleep is the only potion –
The bitter heart is the one still beating.

To Him, the Dead Matter More than the Living

When the crimson heart blooms
and the family album splatters
its perfect sepia,

I reach into the dark box
of childhood fragments,
baby tooth and dog collar.

I try on his name
and anemones shatter
like small glass hands.

He carves
a metal swing
into a future effigy.

He says the worst kind of death
is to die of thirst –
your veins become a spring.

These words follow me,
rattling cups and holding their dark ending
to my mouth,

as if I held that blood river
of his in my palms, rising up to my lips,
tasting of rust.

Aleah Sato is the author of *Badlands and Stillborn Wilderness* (Pooka Press). Her work has appeared in *Nthposition*, *Adirondack Review*, *Blue Fifth Review*, *Shadowtrain*, *American Poetry Review*, *The Argotist*, and *Eclectica*, among others. Aleah lives in the Southwest with her dog, and can always be found wandering the desert and canyons. She can be reached through her blog, The Wild Muse, <https://aleahsato.wordpress.com>

Gregory Wm. Gunn

Vague Idea I

Afterward? Colour and names
applied to those colours,
the memory of you a certain
hue once possessed?
The all-inclusive sack of songs,
an everlasting tra-la-la refrain?
Urban life? Landscapes?
A massive blur of metal as
vehicles whiz on by, each car,
truck, or cycle with made-up
stranger sounding names?
Perhaps, yet erstwhile, I'm
aroused every now and then
part way through a dream
with a headful of unfamiliar words
that give reasonable explanations
for all of these: it's artificial as well as
an unlucky accident weakening that
shallowness, yet also contains
as a complete tome on Brighton
living solely contains all chapters
of that tome. The dark dystopias
and the insignificant apices –
both are nonchalantly buoyed
by a deluge's surface that is
unconcerned about anything

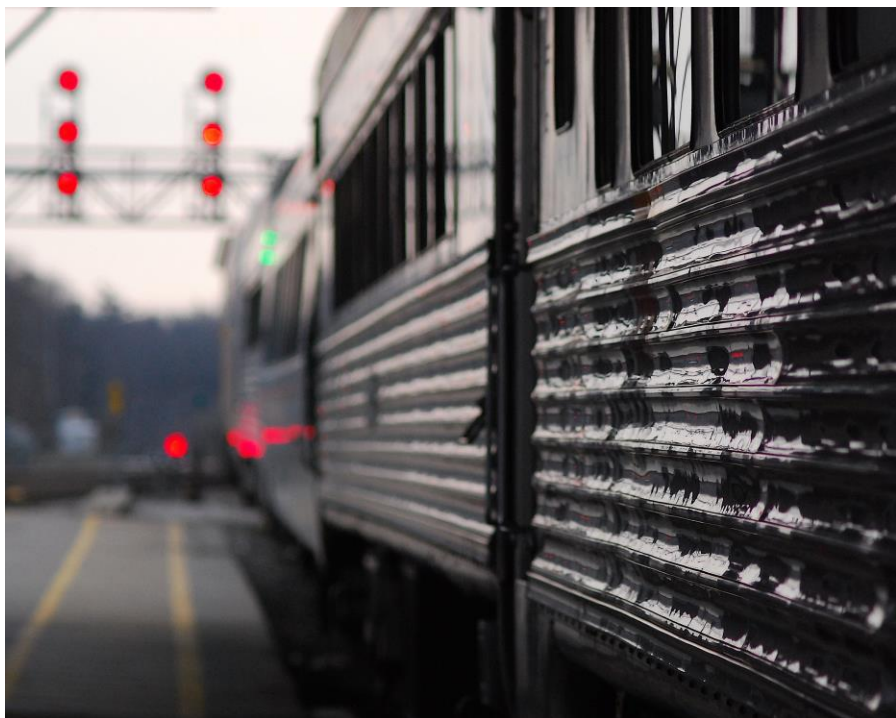
materialistic whatsoever, not even
its own existence per se.

There were commemorative
occasions where we often would
connect, and yes, they were most
suitable, but the moments in
between become rancid, ingest
their own substance, make
an orphan of it, disown it,
but the air is contained in
curtains, reigns as a centenary.

Not a soul can ingress nor egress.
These portions of the same frame:
an individual may quite feasibly exist
lacking a digit or an entire hand or
part of a leg or arm; however, the head
is certainly required, and what is
dubious remains. Today the brain
is trying to absorb Latin. Later comes
a little naptime so be quiet, please.

Gregory Wm. Gunn lives in London, Ontario, and has been widely published in various literary journals including *The Toronto Quarterly*, *Side B Magazine*, *Inscribed Magazine*, *Burning Wood*, *20 X 20 Magazine*, *Crack the Spine*, *Covalence*, *Blue Lake Review*, *Yes Poetry*, and *The Light Ekphrastic*. His latest book is *The Higher Self: Preferred Poems 1981-2016* and is available from Lulu Press.

Via Train – Carmi Levy



Orange Slice – Carmi Levy



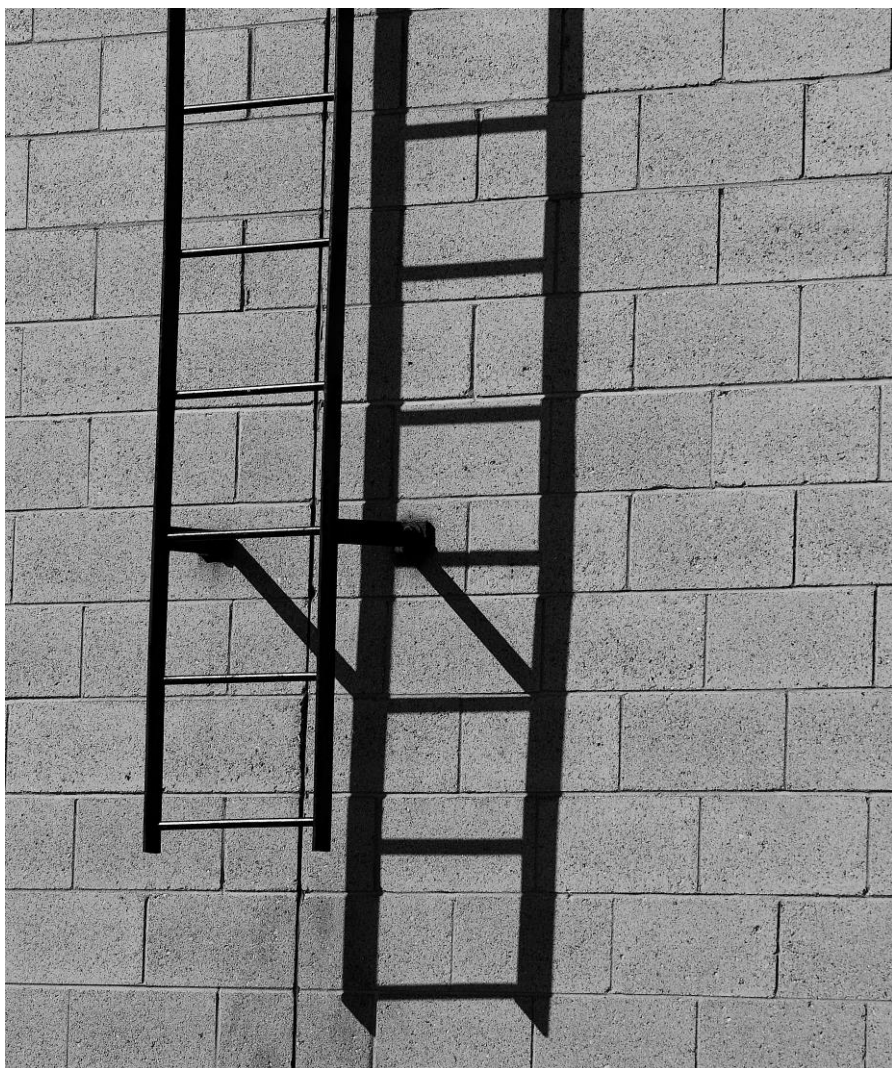
Beach Gull – Carmi Levy



Four Birds – Carmi Levy



Shadow Ladder – Carmi Levy



Carmi Levy is a London-based technology analyst, journalist, digital marketer, cyclist, husband and father. He bought his first SLR as a teenager in the hope that it would help him tell richer stories. He's been sticking his lens in all sorts of places ever since. Find his work at <https://www.instagram.com/carmilevy/>

Leonard Orr

Balance Issues

My doctor said,
for someone with your
balance issues,

be especially cautious
whenever you step
on or off a curb.

Look down and see
your feet. Then,
of course, going

up or down stairs.
Always hold the railings
with at least one hand.

I am sure you will,
after your recent
incident. But

showers are the most
dangerous places,
especially when you

close your eyes when
washing your hair.
I thought of my rebuttal.

My mother had me walk
with books on my head
as a silent criticism

of schlumpy visitors,
especially cousins,
slouched in couches.

Curbs were always
a hazard to anyone,
not just those with

balance issues. At my
first visit, I had to provide
a history of my falls –

bicycle crashes, my tragic
attempts at running,
near-fatal encounters with curbs.

I don't expect any dangerous
showers in the future. I am
content with the rich recall

of those athletic showers
with my late-life love,
clean and well-balanced.

Eye Surgery

The “informed consent”
video showing the procedures
and what could go wrong

reminded me of painful scenes
from classic movies. Buñuel’s
Un Chien Andalou opens with

a man stroking a razorblade
on a leather strop. He looks out
a window at the moon touched by

a long, thin cloud. A woman sits
calmly in a chair and he holds
her eyelids open then looks up,

cuts across the moon. I won’t
mention the eye tormenting
scenes in *A Clockwork Orange*

or *Brazil*. After all, you might
need to have eye surgery one day.
Just in case something goes wrong,

as they say in the video, I thought
maybe I should spend six months
traveling to all the visual wonders

I have missed: the great deserts,
the Northern Lights, the Himalayas,
Tuscany and Florence, sunny Greece,

melancholy fjords. The listing
drained my energy. I would give up
all of these, and all of my favorite

cities and museums, if I could
see my lost love again, who looked,
I thought, like Audrey Hepburn,

wearing the same little black dress,
seated across from me in a restaurant
or standing in the front of the room

reading a poem, leaning up to the mic,
soft and warm, breathily, the audience
all leaning forward, so lucky to see.

Annual Review

I'm the first to complain about
reducing life to numbers,
to filling in online forms
originally created by the
College of Agriculture. But
now it has evolved and
user-customized and nudged
so it is almost revealing.
It means keeping track
of everything that can
be counted. Most of the work
is done by the chip inserted
into my shoulder. My
first negative mark in this new
system was for explaining
how funny it was that they
were making an old cliché
literal! Don't joke with
Big Data staff, that's my tip.
Twelve cups of coffee a day
kept me going over the last
calendar year (4,380 cups).
I have improved so much
this year, despite my love
suddenly ending our romance.

Now when I see her name
in some online reminder
("It is -----'s birthday tomorrow!
Don't forget to celebrate!"),
I rarely turn off all the lights,
lie down on my side on a rug
and moan until I fall asleep.
This happened only fourteen times
in the last calendar year, down
almost 120%. There has been
a slight uptick in my attempts
to communicate with my love
through mesmeric transmissions
(up ten percent). Goal for next year:
steady progress in all areas.

Leonard Orr has published three books of poetry: *Why We Have Evening* (2010), *Timing Is Everything* (2012), and *A Floating Woman* (2015), all from WordTech/Cherry Grove. His work has appeared in *Poetry International*, *Rattle*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Cirque*, and elsewhere. He teaches literature at Washington State University.

Lynn Tait

True Friends

I don't deserve them,
swaying in their coveted breeze
holding my empty pupa, saving
more than is necessary. My offerings:
too small or offering nothing at all.

Yet, I'm inundated with the letter L,
Love and the names of hearts
who've spent countless hours as ears,
as leaning posts for this small moth,
markings smeared in a lop-sided mess.
Silent and brooding at the worst of times,
noisy and unkempt at best.

Still, they let me fly and cling,
guide me away from the fire in my head,
expecting nothing in return
point out and steer me away

from gaslights of shadow figures,
false testimony of broken people
who promise everything
at a price so crushing –

protect me from jagged-edged spotlights
littered with half-dead and broken butterflies,
strewn across cold landscapes
distorted beyond recognition.

Lynn Tait is an award-winning poet/photographer residing in Sarnia, Ontario. Her poems have appeared in *Contemporary Verse 2*, *Windsor Review*, *Vallum*, *FreeFall Magazine*, *Quills Canadian Poetry Magazine*, *Literary Review of Canada* and in over 100 anthologies. *Breaking Away* is the title of her chapbook and she is co-author of the book *Encompass*, published by Beret Days Press. Her photo art has graced the covers of 7 poetry books. She is a member of The Ontario Poetry Society, the League of Canadian Poets, and co-founder of *After Hours Poets*, a local poetry workshop.

Jennifer Wenn

East Wind

— *to Dad*

Born in the realms of sunrise,
maturing over Buffalo,
gathering strength as it rolls
westward down Erie,
hurtling through the Nanticoke-Long Point gap,
bursting forth an elemental symphony
onto our waiting shore.

Pleasure craft confined to safe harbours,
trees bent and strained, planters blown over,
whitecaps foaming in the distance,
breakers far past the second sandbar
flinging skyward thrill-seeking kitesurfers
and roiling up sand and seaweed
to hurl ashore.

Swept up in the middle of a
traditional three day blow
I stand out on the rocks
near the crashing waves,
hair streamed back, leaning in like a
mermaid on the prow of a clipper.
Beachgoers chased away,
except for the kitesurfers and
a few hardy souls who share the secret,

likewise alive in the moment,
a knowing smile, an understanding wave,
conversation beyond an arm's-length
drowned by the din.

And back there, on the bench swing
tucked into the corner of the yard,
ensconced where Mom bundled him up,
is Dad, determined to be here,
determined to face the gale,
grass just to his front a tiny green swirling ocean,
bamboo to the right whipped into a frenzy,
watching seagulls beating against the tempest,
now hovering in place, now gaining precious metres.
Old Man Willow across the little road,
ancient shore sentinel, hangs on, for now;
Mary's silver maple on the other side
of the dirt drive just a memory.
And churned up with the sediment
other memories, long ago warm summer gales,
us kids exhilarated body surfers,
flying like marlins through the shallows,
Grampy scanning with binoculars
for the big Lakers that bounce on the horizon,

driven closer from open water
to hew a safer course.

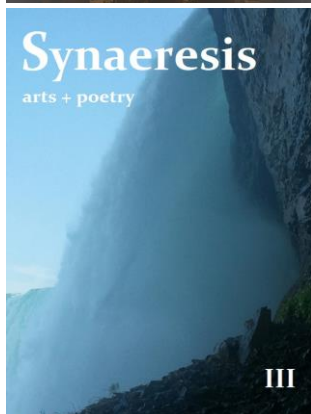
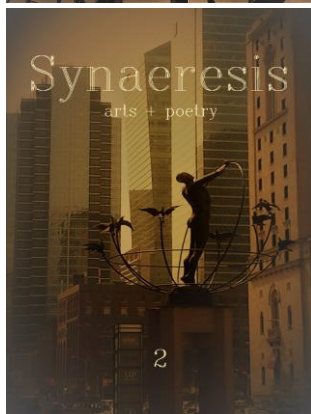
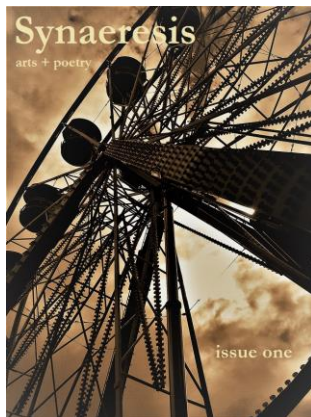
On this chill fall day Nature's chorale
thunders through and around us,
steady with enervating crescendos,
lifting up all who spread their wings
and brave the east wind.

Jennifer Wenn is a trans-identified writer from London, Ontario. In addition to her day job as a Systems Analyst, she has written *From Adversity to Accomplishment*, a family and social history; and published poetry in *Tuck Magazine* and the anthology *Things That Matter*. She is also the proud parent of two adult children.

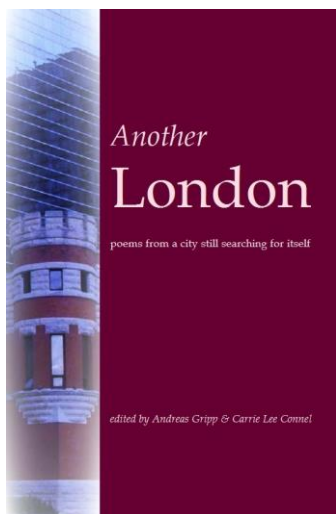
Toronto Pigeon — **Andreas Gripp**



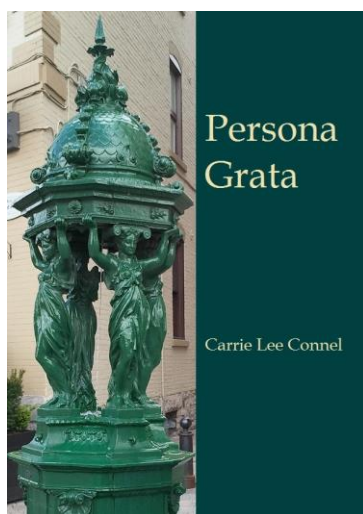
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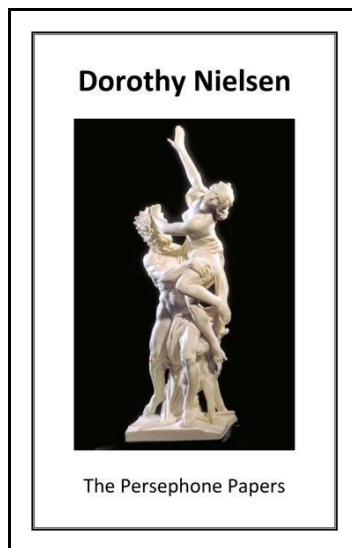
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